



# After the pandemic:

## Supporting children's special needs

### The statistics

- A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that 20% of teen hospitalizations between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2021, were for psychiatric emergencies<sup>1</sup>
- Emergency-room visits for mental-health crises among 12- to 17-year-olds increased 31% between 2019 and 2020<sup>2</sup>
- An October 2020 survey showed that 31% of parents said their child's mental or emotional health was worse than before the pandemic; the top concern for teens was anxiety (28%)<sup>3</sup>

### Addressing the pandemic's cost on children

While children are not likely to get seriously ill with COVID they can still be the victims of it. Isolation, worries about social distancing, remote learning and fear of illness have taken a toll on children's emotional health and social skills.

Bright Horizons Special Needs™ benefit was designed to help parents navigate the special education journey. But parents are also finding help for the issues their children are facing because of the pandemic.

**'A parent may say I don't have a child with special needs, but in the world in which we're living a child that needs additional academic support or has anxiety or mental stress can greatly benefit from this program,' said Melissa Jacoby, Bright Horizons' senior director, solutions strategy.**

### Signs your child might need more support

- Excessive worry or sadness
- Drastic changes in sleep – too much or not enough
- Increased Irritability or "acting out"
- Poor academic performance or avoiding school altogether
- Loss of interest in activities enjoyed in the past
- Little to no interest in human connection

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study, March 2021

<sup>2</sup> CDC study, March 2021

<sup>3</sup> Research Report For The JED Foundation, Dec. 2020

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## Special needs are individual needs

Bright Horizons Special Needs program supports a variety of challenges, from academic learning to behavioral support.

'I have a friend whose daughter developed an eating disorder because she had no social outlet and she was watching all these skinny girls on TikTok,' said Melissa.

'There are kids in my town who, after a year of remote learning, decided to stay remote because they're too anxious to go back to school. They've forgotten how to make friends because they've been in front of a screen all year. This program can support children as they redevelop social skills and are reintroduced into a school environment and society.'

## How the Special Needs program can help

Access to the benefit is through an interactive website that provides a portal to a wide range of resources, from basic information about different topics to special needs communities and one-on-one advice with an expert. There are three main ways to get assistance for your child's needs:

- 1. Information** – Find everything from live monthly webinars and on demand recorded webinars to podcasts and eGuides on topics ranging from behavior, bullying, friendships and social skills, screen time, self-care and special education. Or use the 'Ask an expert' feature to receive answers to your questions from a credentialed professional and explore answers to questions other parents are asking.
- 2. Advisory sessions with an expert** in your area of concern. Book a one-hour phone session with a credentialed Bright Horizons expert who can recommend resources, explain laws and best practices, and provide insights to address your specific concerns. Bright Horizons experts have more than 10 years of educational and/or clinical experience and 95 percent hold advanced degrees.
- 3. Tools** to manage every aspect of your child's journey, from checklists to schedules and activity logs and decision-support tool.

'We encourage parents to dive in and see what is there,' said Melissa. 'Type a topic into the search tool, like teen stress and get a list of resources, including webinars and eGuides and forum topics. It's all available free as part of their bp benefits.'

## Hope is the strategy

As research studies continue to document the effects of the pandemic on children's lives, it's more important than ever to focus on their social and emotional development and well-being.

'Fortunately, children are resilient and have enormous capacity to adapt,' Melissa emphasized. As the world re-opens and children begin to socialize and reengage in group environments, most will quickly develop many of those skills that may have been delayed. For the rest, the good news is there are tools available to help.

## Getting started

If you're not already registered with Bright Horizons, visit the bp [Bright Horizons website](#). Register by entering **Employer Username:** Bpcare, **Password:** care4you.

To access Bright Horizons special needs:

### Step 1: Register

Visit [clients.brighthouse.com/bp](#). Scroll down to 'Access Special Needs Support' and click on 'Use It.' Complete the form to create your personal username and password.

### Step 2: Add your child's information

Fill out basic information about your child, such as schools, evaluations, diagnoses and specific concerns. The system guides you to the specific content and tools that might be most appropriate for your child.

### Step 3: Verify your email address and begin

Click the link in the email to verify your address so that you can access all the tools and resources in the platform. Once your registration is complete, you can start receiving expert guidance on how to support your child's needs.

